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Bard

The way the light is stored in hills
amazes me, I trust
the ancient dispositions of the earth

yet it is snow and ice itself and wind
might menace us this very night.
And the bare knobs and the green

knobs all round the Georgia upland,
all the wooden gouged out plateau
south of the great greyblue mountains,

the massif. The earth we try to climb
away from now to land an hour later
in that useful sphere called home.

Where work is and this mind, even, kind.

16 November 1995
Atlanta

Sunrises. And now a yellower brighter in bluer
clearer airer hollowtreed through one pyramidal
spruce ascending like green flame the one that stands
up from Mohammed's clothes and means his human form
no image ought to handle, flame alone,
sun-same as sun now who would dare to look at
this nuclear resurrection in our morning parish
hydrogen to helium in sky and look it in the eye
our fields forces multiplexed in heaven yellow
one sunrise over the old red broke barn.

17 November 1995

PLEIADES

*Orion
striding.
The Pleiades
caught in trees.*

*Moon a couple
days this
side of full*

*Star knife
searching me*

Above you
every
 night and now you know it.

Welterfare, world of water and night sign.

A woman name's all is one
and pick the stars those fine stern far fires
apart like daisies.

 She loves me cause I know her name.
I'm the feint in her paper,
I'm the rule in her shoe,
I'm the gin in her pocket,
pebble her, wobble me,
 devious mind, the clever
light comes in.

 There is much going in her coming,
land's away, sea-bottoming ruses,

I said all this so you would touch me,
numbered street in Boulder Colorado
off Kalmia (latifolia), a house

sudden beneath November snow. Skirt of it,
seven inches on the radio, a size
we recognize.

Teach the courier
to shoe his horse while it's still running,
then teach the valleys to fill up with rainbows,
small ones, very bright, odd shapes
(coming and going; touching and retreating;
repeating; the light is sitting still)
many rainbows, one for each
of your excellent intentions,
the moral spelling of each acted day.

Then the whole cwm (coombe)
lifted into the mountain, shadowfall
and you begin to doubt the God you'd seen.

Tell me, can an eraser rub away
the word you meant and wrote and stared at
gasping at the pain of how true it was,
all dark and accurate on the bland paper
before you freaked and rubbed it out?

Write that word
down again
you do not need,

a word once spoken
(written)
becomes part of the geology

the place.
Can a word become a rock?
can a reed mock me?

Can a rock rede me?
I'm not afraid of your music,
death comes anyhow,

a concert is the best departure
maybe,
be musical.

Poliphilo pauses by the obelisk—
what mind does this stone mean?

And then by the sandstone Elephant
Messer Domani carved life-size

to symbolize out loud
how heavily the memory is freighted,

verity,
nothing forgets itself in us.

Sometimes you have to beat the hide to make it speak.
Beast, drum, leash

run, and then it does, and bleeds and stars and blues
above a little island in the sky called The End of All This,

slung from Orion's belt the Agony Nebula pours new raw worlds out.

17 November 1995

[revised 9 II 96]

Demon bees in meditation
Cathar crickets on the cliffs of Montségur
katydids in clefts of rock

the clamor in the quiet mind
of just this blood and lymph and sense
sensing like christmas in this veil of grace

this flesh body lorn and lovely listens.

18 November 1995

JAMBUDVIPA HEIMSKRINGLA OH

Thicket of earth we breathe among
caught in the branches of air
stretching into our chests
we work from that, we clock
the occasions of the unspeakable
in public building fresco poetry
by Muses meant

in this shallow anthroposphere.

19 November 1995

Cloud-herds, sky-loafers, dew-collectors
Just watch.
It's all written in the sky.
And the doors float by,
Shut or wide open so you can see through
Into the previous condition
Of which the sun is one bright shadow
And your whim another.

20 November 1995

The sky looks democrat today
a subtle band of blue east by west
then empties itself south
into the prevailing luster.
Pearl. Pack ice. Milk.
Everyway the same and everywhere
rise of the Dutch republic.

20 November 1995

You'd think I have so many of them letters would
Flow themward like the rampaging Yangtze
Through gorges full of shouting gibbons. Friends.
And so I have, but mostly I love them
For the smell of their shampoo, their footstep
On the hollow porch step, their midwest accents,
Their feckless lasagnas, and their complaints
Squelching like paddock boots through the muck
Of this bad world. I love them for their complaints.
Lips, mastery of foreign tongues, their wives,
Grasp of recent trends in fiction, botany, Venetian
Reminiscences, Thai food. But mostly (I confess)
For their complaining. Planh. Their griefs
My gift. Grief gives me something to discuss with them,
Console them, advise them, talk them soft to sleep
Even, in the tawdry Protestant attic bedrooms
Where we all sleep best, between shelves of old books
And the motheaten panda with glass eyes. Map
On the wall of Europe in the war, Axis prussian blue
Infecting all of France. Flags of our Allies
In the margin, but where are our own devices,
Keenly grieving, yellow consolations? Sunrise.
How did you sleep? Here's your coffee
Left over from the foundations of the world.

20 November 1995

WHAT THE CLOTH TELLS US WE WEAR

Amaze me all over again, I am made from wool
and I am anxious to ascend. Take me anywhere,
I am your man. When men wear cuffs
their rolled-up parts amass colorless fluff,

dust of all the secret Gobis run to fill each step
until we are nowhere but where we've been.
Hence the necktie, to hold the wind in place.
Hence the Shriner's tie pin to hold down the tie.

Hence the body of a man beneath all that,
even in the middle of some committee
he remembers the feel of water.
The hand of things reaches out to touch him.

20 November 1995

UNDERHILLS

1.

It is a little thing to bother about but the hill
is still waiting on the other side of the door
and the sun that sets into it every afternoon
is a calm cool waterfowl kind of luminary
that waits in the greeny shadows of the earth
where princesses in their whimsical variety
cheer that weary lord with improving conversation.
The hill is there and I'm here like a ship
at the dock I suppose or (to make it warmer)
a shearer waiting for his fated sheep. Waiting
is everything in this large world. I have bided
as they say my time until I wondered if I owned
anything at all but its passage, minutes, hours,
suns and moons. Into the door they all go.

2.

The hill I mean was taught me when I was young.
A mother sometimes meant it, and the books
explained every shade of green as meaning that
grass-furred rounded upland with a sudden door
would open to some accidental traveler. I yearned
to be among their somber number and pass inside
like a child, arms thrown back on my pillow,
falling asleep. That's the way you go down
into earth, not worried, just looking around.
No one cares what you think, just go on
thinking. And gently they come to you then
to find out what's on your mind, touch you
with velvet gloves, not wasting a minute
they teach you the slow language of your bones.

21 November 1995

TOWER OF IT

Oblivious newspapers tend to be politically slightly on the side of waking. An election in Lodz, pronounced wudj. The things we bother to know, the languages we made up frantically for thousands of years, every encampment dithering with dialects. And all for what? To make a parable in the Bible, a building with stones falling from it night and day, aye, it is death to be near one of those, glass crack, anodized aluminum sheets shearing down, pavement littered with the dead. For we will climb, try to get on brazen elevator cars and mount to the Welfare Department, deep in the belly of the building. The clerks wake up only to denounce us, their clear ceremonious rudenesses ring out. You understand that in any language, groan of sleepy baritones, shriek of midlife crisis. And the poor troop out again, foiled again by language. It's just invented to say No.

21 November 1995

for Charlotte

I'm telling too much about it and never telling enough,
it's the forest again, the somnolent mathematics of the
trees,

and somewhere deep inside, in a bank or a sunken hill
a cave mouth opens, and a door swings free.

Because there is another country, I know it, we walked
sometimes through it in the driving rain when we
thought

it was just Canada or the Pacific or November,
ravens and whales and dark houses with bright fires in
them.

But it was the other country, sometimes we guessed it
between one footstep and the next, there and back
again

before the rain could dry on our faces. But we knew
it.

We were there, and it was together, and five years
pass.

I think we would not have found it without each other
but I know I never found it without you. The hill
is built of waiting, trees are made of patient wood,
a tree looks at the air around it as a girl looks at the
sea,

evening, when from the edge of the island there is
nothing

but the sea going out forever and she goes with it.
She who is always returning. And there is nothing
you want the sea to do. It is always our first evening

in that country, enough to be there together, arrived
against all hope in the accurate condition. You were
born
knowing these things. Being with you is being there,
so in some sense like that I was born with you—
happy birthday to the world inside the world!
Happy birthday to the door that lets us in!

22 November 1995

HUMANKIND AND POTTED POTHOS PLANTS

And we were swearing to each other
the kinds of oaths that bars elicit
with their green white amber red
and never blue, despite all your pousse
cafés there are no really blue liqueurs
and patriotism goes the way of smoke,
up from the hullabaloo into the exhaust
and we're left with television's mild
obscenity and the private weary lists,
lusts, dusts, musts, mists we carry
in the hollow of the heart. Meet people.
They are just like themselves. Hot Wings
now and pickled eggs forty years ago,
no different. Or same difference,
as we used to say in Astoria bars, cool
only on the hottest afternoons,
when we waited for Ronnie Ritter
to get finished powdering her nose
and saunter her brunette way back
to the table so her boyfriend Gene
would stop worrying about what she was up to,
what could it be, she dances and gets tired
then sits down. When we're thirsty
we also drink. Don't make a religion
out of it, for Christ's sake. Soft cushioned
sleazy vinyl booths, darkened lounge,
juke box goofy with white jazz.
Sometimes she brought us sticky
buns her father baked, nipped
from the showcase for her lover
and all his nogood friends. Embarrassing
in a saloon, bag beginning to show grease.
Nowadays bars frequently have green plants,
Boston ivy, spider plants, and pothos
that wandering waxy leaved explorer
that will cruise around the room for years

looking for someone, the way we do
all afternoon, all night, and at 4 AM
they coax us out so down the subway
and up the frosty el we go, spirits
of investigation and complaint.
For some reason the name means yearning.

22 November 1995

THE DARK MIRROR SCRATCHED DESPITE LOVE'S CARE

1. Among the Vessels

What I did and what I thought
I was doing. Where the Plymouth
thought it was going. The hill
up the road, the old Palermo recording
of Scotto singing *La Straniera*,
how the world is mostly weeping,
the hill, the hard, the silent
father, the landscape below
untouchable in simple distance
blue as a pearl in no one's hand.

He did not answer. Things
don't answer. Not till we make
them speak. I had a little red book
with empty pages, I was sworn
to fill them using what was called
writing. I was a chemist, a composer
of sonatas, a classical scholar,
a detective, a beachcomber, a pianist
mostly, great tenor, conquistador,
a boy in the front seat alongside

his silent father. Vinyl weaving
seat covers old car the War was over,
there are few professions closed to desire,
I was Heidegger, I was Mahler grieving,
I was the faithless wife of every Cæsar,
I was the Pope and brought Stalin to his knees.
Silence breeds talk, music breeds
interminable conversation. The father's
silence is a fire in his son, and now
the chorus out there disguised as dawn.

2. Arugula

God this is boring, all this remembering,
call it *A Silence Remembered* and make it
vaguely Irish, full of potted plants,
liverwurst sandwiches I detest, show tunes
whose lyrics don't stick in the mind. Fake it.
Rooms and rooms of relatives quietly
making each other uneasy. Don't you hate it
when it gets boring, and nothing happens
in a line of poetry but words, words, words?
I want every instant to be eventful, ripe

luminous confusion, a rush hour crowd
crossing Sixth Avenue and Forty-second Street
like limitless shoals of mackerel
and nobody touching. I want every word
to break out in a sweat and start
babbling about its original meanings,
tell everything, break into images
and images stand up against the setting sun
talking their heads off like aunts at a funeral,
telling rosary beads and fathomless histories.

But it would be better if I were even more boring,
a bored audience is the sign of successful Art—
bored out of their skulls and plenty of silence,
plenty of time to think and think well of themselves
for putting up with such tedium in the name
of Art, and by extension feel good about the artist
who puts them through such a moral misery,
uplifted by inattention, the sheen of sleep
glimmering between the rare events. And later
the sheer release of going out into the street.

Art. Dingy classroom that sets you free at last.

23 November 1995